

# Act Your Age!

By Patrick McGeown

**N**awng! Nawng! How I'd love someone to call me *nawng*. But I have to face the facts: I'm getting to an age where I get called *phee*. Soon it could be *loong*, and not too far off it could be *ta*. And I'm not sure if I like it. I really need to start looking for the Fountain of Youth. But am I on my own? Is growing old that hard to accept?

For some, the acceptance of one's age is a hard thing to do. When I was ten I wanted to be a teenager. And as a teenager I wanted to be in my twenties. And in my twenties I wanted to re-experience my teenage years. But as I approached 30 and the body grew older I couldn't disguise it any longer: people knew I wasn't a teenager. So I jumped from 19 to 30 very quickly. At 31, I feared turning 40, and now at 41 I have accepted my age 100 per cent — sort of.

The first thing I do when I am given a photograph is to search for myself. These days I have to be careful. If the lighting is wrong, the snap taken at the wrong angle, the photographer an amateur, or the camera of inferior quality I can end up looking like I've just got off my deathbed. I have an image to uphold, and today I am forced to destroy nine out of ten photographs; I never had this problem when I was younger. Now if anyone looks through my photograph album they always tell me I take a good photograph. What they don't know is that I've destroyed thousands of photographs to get a few presentable ones.

We don't just decide we're old, we're told in the cruelest of ways. A child saying Gee, you're old!, now that isn't normally a problem. Except when you are with a group of younger friends and it is their child who says it. Yes, we smile and laugh it off; but when you get home it's straight to the mirror to double check. In our minds we pass the delinquent child's comment off. But the reflection in the glass

reveals wrinkles, excess fat, hair loss, double chin. Perhaps that wretched child had a point — but what a hide!

So it's off to the panel beaters. Here you can get anything from a facial to a hair transplant. And for the real courageous the surgeon can work wonders — although I don't know of anyone who has had this form of beautification. I have been told that plastic surgery is rarely discussed by people who have had it. But it is great for gossip at social gatherings.

When I was a boy, choosing the right clothes took anything from ten to 20 seconds. But now it takes forever.

The right colour to match my complexion — pastels only, dark colours make me look too skinny and old. But what are the right colours to wear? I've been caught many times: clothes look great in a magazine and on the model, but when you actually get to wear new clothes they can be disappointing. Many people say it is not the style of clothes that matters; it is the colour. And the easiest way to know the colour that suits you best is to wait for comments from friends and staff about how lovely you look. If there are no comments pass those clothes on quickly.

But if you get lots of positive comments, you know you're wearing the right colours. In my case, if I am lucky to get a favourable comment I wear that colour to death.

And people genuinely want to help me look younger. My dentist wanted to straighten my teeth — at my age! Straighten them, I cried; I'm just happy to have kept them! But some people do actually get the dentist to do a mouth jobbie. A dear friend of mine decided to have his teeth re-shaped. I don't understand the process, but it was a major operation; it involved removing the teeth and packing them back all nice and straight.

The poor man. He paid a fortune and ended up





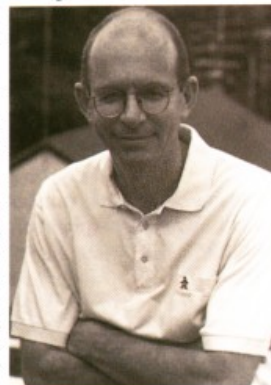
Opposite page: The author (seated), dressed up in old-time clothes: "When I was younger I wanted to be older." This page: A bouncy McGeown: "At this age I never knew the fears I would have of getting old."



looking like the lead actor from the movie, *Planet Of The Apes*. His restructured teeth protruded, they were so big. His whole appearance changed, and, please forgive me, but we talked behind his back. He was the same man, the same personality, the same everything but his munches were gnashing at everything in his way. None of us could keep a straight face when we saw him — he was so different. Not ugly, but very, very different.

And the right clothes. I never had a problem with size 33 waist. It was perfect for years. Now I find a size 33 painful to wear. But I'll keep wearing that size. It's my size: the manufacturers will have to get their act together. I'm not about to go up a size. Goodness me, even the measuring tapes are wrong. The young man at the department store measures me, and there in front of my eyes I can see size 34. But no, I insist on 33. The poor salesman will be the last person to know of the conspiracy by clothing manufacturers and tape measure companies. I must admit size 33 isn't that comfortable, and wearing that size makes me walk like I'm wearing roller blades but sometimes we have to stand up for what we believe.

I'm often invited out to discos. But I just can't do it, I'm past that. Twenty years ago I was at the height of disco fever. The pink flares, polyester flowered shirt, platform heels, long sideburns and then some. Those days are past me; that era has gone. No longer do I listen to the Sex Pistols, Clash, or Alice Cooper. No longer do I have to spend hours gelling my hair into a wave. No longer do I rage at parties and wake up feeling refreshed after three hours' sleep. No longer can I eat three hamburgers for lunch and be starving for dinner. Those days are gone. I am now a respectable gent who is ageing very nicely. Drats! **I**



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